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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 6084
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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Taiwan

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that tonight Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik will

meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and later with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The radio reported that Itzik invited Karnit Goldwasser, the wife of one of the soldiers kidnapped into Lebanon, to join her.

Ha'aretz reported (lead story in Ha'aretz (English Ed.)), that on Tuesday in Moscow the head of the Hamas political bureau, Khaled Mashal, reiterated that his organization was not willing to recognize Israel, saying that Israel must end the occupation and the suffering of the Palestinian people and "only then will the Palestinians make their position [on recognition] clear." Other Hamas spokesmen told Ha'aretz on Tuesday that the Mecca Agreement, in which Fatah and Hamas agreed to form a government of national unity, has not altered in any way the Islamist organization's stance on Israel. Ha'aretz quoted the Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, Ismail Radwan, as saying that the organization will never negotiate with Israel. The newspaper quoted a different spokesman of the organization in the Gaza Strip, Fauzi Barhum, as saying that "Hamas has decided to show a political horizon, but our position is clear. All the land of Palestine [from the sea to the river] belongs to the Palestinians and Israel is the enemy. However, our political horizon offers a hudna for 15-20 years, in return for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders, the return of the refugees and the release of the prisoners." Ha'aretz quoted Russian FM Sergey Lavrov as saying during the joint press conference with Mashal that his country would work toward lifting the international embargo on the PA and that it will support the new unity government. "Russia supports the understandings reached between Hamas and Fatah over the sharing of power, because they are an expression of reason, wisdom and responsibility toward the Palestinian people," Lavrov was quoted as saying. The Russian FM added that his country was working to ensure that "all the members of the international community will support this process, including

efforts to lift the embargo." Lavrov was quoted as saying that Mashal had promised an end to the Qassam rocket attacks against Israel. Calling on Hamas to use its strength to end the violence against Israel, Lavrov said that "we have received confirmation that such steps will be adopted," referring to an end to the rocket attacks. The Jerusalem Post and Yediot also reported on the Lavrov-Mashal meeting. Maariv cited the concern of the Israeli leadership over the drafting by the EU of a plan to resume international cooperation with the PA government, even if it does not abide by the Quartet's conditions.

Ha'aretz quoted Defense Minister Amir Peretz as saying on Tuesday, during a visit to the IDF Gaza Division, that Israel is concerned about the continued strengthening and arming of Hamas and that it is following developments closely. Peretz was quoted as saying that Hamas is taking advantage of the cease-fire agreement between Israel and the Palestinians to continue stockpiling arms. "We are definitely doing everything in order to preserve the cease-fire," Peretz was quoted as saying, adding that Israel has "no reason to turn [Hamas's] strengthening into a real threat to Israel." Peretz refused to rule out a military operation in the Gaza Strip. "Every solution that protects the citizens of Israel is possible," he was quoted as saying. "We prefer a diplomatic solution, but where that doesn't work out, we will also conduct military operations."

Leading electronic media reported that this morning three Palestinians were killed and an elite undercover Border Policeman lightly wounded in a Jenin refugee camp. According to the Border Police, all three were Islamic Jihad members, including Ashraf Sa'adi, a senior member of the group, and two of his aides, Mohammed Abu Nasser and Daoud Jibli. However, Ha'aretz's web site quoted Palestinian sources as saying that one of those killed was a taxi driver.

Yediot reported that Hizbullah is about to get "Fateh 110" rockets from Iran, which have a range of 250 kilometers, are more precise, easier to launch, and more difficult to trace than Hizbullah's current rockets. The newspaper said that if they are deployed in Lebanon, they could strike Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Beersheva. The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli sources as saying on Tuesday that Israel is considering taking action to stop the smuggling of weapons from Syria to Hizbullah, although plans for the time being entail a continuation of diplomatic efforts to change UNIFIL's mandate so

that the UN force will deploy along the Syrian-Lebanese border.

Maariv reported that, in recent days, Syrian commentators and military experts have voiced the concern that Israel could initiate a military strike in the Golan. This was broadly publicized in the Syrian media, in response to the publication of the annual intelligence assessment of Israel's security agencies.

Ha'aretz reported that government bodies have been promoting a preliminary plan over the past few weeks to build a neighborhood of 11,000 units for the ultra-Orthodox near the East Jerusalem airport. The plan also calls for the construction of a tunnel under a Palestinian neighborhood to connect the new quarter to one of the settlements in the Beit El area east of Ramallah. Ha'aretz quoted MK Otniel Schneller (Kadima), a former settler leader, as saying on Tuesday that the Housing Ministry is the body that developed a plan to erect the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood. Ha'aretz said that the ministry denied any knowledge of the project.

In its lead story, Ha'aretz (Hebrew Ed.) reported that on Tuesday the US administration confirmed that it has agreed to participate in a regional meeting with countries bordering with Iraq -- including Iran and Syria. This move is supposed to neutralize one of the most complex political obstacles for the United States' public relations.

Ha'aretz quoted Secretary Rice as saying on Tuesday at a congressional hearing that Iraq is the inviting party and that there will be no direct US-Iranian talks. Ha'aretz wrote that, according to the plan, the talks, in which David Satterfield, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State and Coordinator for Iraq, will represent the US, are due to start this month. Ha'aretz said that a ministerial-level committee, in which Rice will take part, is planned for April. The newspaper wrote that the UK, Russia, and international organizations, are among the bodies that will take part in the talks. Ha'aretz quoted international sources as saying that the participation of those bodies would pave the way for a more fruitful dialogue on further issues in contention between the US and Syria. Ha'aretz quoted observers in Washington as saying that the US has been under heavy pressure by the Iraqi government and its Western allies to walk the extra mile towards Iran. Yediot also mentioned the turn in US policy.

Ha'aretz reported that a proposed constitution written by the Israeli Arab advocacy center, Adalah, states that Arab Knesset members will be able to bring about the disqualification of bills that impinge on the rights of Arabs, and classifies the State of Israel as a "bilingual and multicultural" country rather than a Jewish state. The proposal, entitled "The Democratic Constitution," also calls for majority and minority groups to split control of the government in such a way that will strengthen the Arab minority on issues relating to the character of the state. Adalah's version of the constitution essentially abolishes the Jewish elements of Israel, but allows the Jewish majority to maintain its character through educational and cultural institutions. The proposal invalidates the Law of Return, which grants automatic citizenship to people with at least one Jewish grandparent, and states that citizenship will be granted to those who come to Israel for humanitarian reasons, regardless of their religion. The document states that the "internal refugees" -- Arab residents and their descendants expelled in 1948 and whose number is estimated at about a quarter of today's Israeli Arab citizens -- will return to the area where they used to live and receive compensation. The introduction to the proposed constitution demands that Israel recognize its responsibility for the "historical injustices that it caused the Palestinian nation in its entirety," withdraw from the territories and recognize the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. The proposal sets the state's borders along the 1967 cease-fire lines. The proposed constitution grants citizenship to all descendants of Israeli citizens, whether they were born here or abroad, as well as to all spouses of Israeli citizens thereby undermining Israeli efforts to limit marriages between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians living in the territories.

All media prominently reported on the issue of the authenticity of university degrees that MK Esterina Tartman (Yisrael Beiteinu) claims to hold, and other irregularities she might have been involved in. The chairman of her party, Strategic Affairs Minister Avigdor Lieberman, might have to decide that she will not be a minister, despite that fact that he endowed the tourism portfolio

with her. The Jerusalem Post reported that most Knesset members now oppose Tartman's appointment. Yediot reported that PM Ehud Olmert expects Tartman's appointment to be rescinded.

Leading media reported that five Bedouin from northern Israel have been arrested on suspicion of gang-raping four young Israeli women, including a 13 year-old girl. "It is because of what your soldiers are doing to us in Gaza," they told one of the victims.

The Jerusalem Post published a Bloomberg wire report citing Elbit Systems Ltd., Israel's biggest non-government defense company, as saying that the US Marine Corps placed a follow-on order valued at USD 51 million for its laser target systems. The order, placed with Elbit's US subsidiary, follows an initial sale from July 2006. The company said that the system provides a "bull's-eye" to target enemy troops with munitions especially designed for laser guidance. The Jerusalem Post cited the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor as saying on Tuesday that Israel is expected to boost agricultural exports to Turkey by approximately USD 17 million this year as a result of a new agriculture agreement that will take effect on March 11.

Ha'aretz reported that on Monday the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, one of the most important Jewish American organizations, decided to support divestment from companies that do business with the Sudanese government responsible for genocide in Darfur.

All media reported that, following an intervention by Olmert, the Histadrut labor federation agreed to cancel the general strike planned for today.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff and military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The more time that passes since the signing of the Mecca Agreement between Hamas and Fatah, the clearer it becomes that the real winner in the current round of internal Palestinian conflict is Hamas."

Block Quotes:

"Hamas Is Still Hamas"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff and military correspondent Amos Harel wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/28): "The more time that passes since the signing of the Mecca Agreement between Hamas and Fatah, the clearer it becomes that the real winner in the current round of internal Palestinian conflict is Hamas. From the declarations of senior Hamas leaders and its spokesmen and from informal conversations with central activists, it is clear the organization does not intend to make significant changes in its hard-line ideological stance. In the words of its Gaza spokesman, Ismail Radwan, 'The organization has changed nothing in its stances toward the conqueror and Zionist enemy,' Radwan told Ha'aretz. At most, according to Radwan, Hamas will accept the 1967 borders as a temporary solution, and that only on condition that the 'Palestinian refugees will return to their homes and all prisoners will be released.' Then Hamas would consider the possibility of a hudna [cease-fire]. Radwan is not part of Hamas' extremist wing. He is considered a representative of the mainstream, led from Damascus by the head of the Hamas political bureau, Khaled Mashal. On Tuesday in Moscow, Mashal was cool to the praise he heard from Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the PA unity government, and immediately reiterated that Hamas would not recognize Israel. When Hamas activists summarize the events in Gaza over the past months, their conclusion is clear: Fatah lost the battle. "Israel has not yet understood that after the Mecca agreement, the disappearance of Fatah is a matter of time," a senior Hamas member said behind closed doors this week. Another senior figure, considered a leader of the pragmatic stream, went even further. 'Of all people,' he said, 'from you Jews, who have known so

many disasters, it should have been expected to be careful not to drown in a sea of Muslims. You might have another Holocaust.'"

12. Taiwan:

Summary:

Senior editor Rami Tal wrote in an editorial of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "It is hard to believe that the Chinese government will not react to a step it considers as an intolerable provocation."

Block Quotes:

"Navigating a Perilous Route"

Senior editor Rami Tal wrote in an editorial of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/28): "China views Taiwan as an integral part of itself. The Chinese authorities have often clarified that they do not intend to go to war in order to conquer Taiwan, and that a solution will only be reached through negotiations.... [But] fulfilling the intention to declare Taiwan's

separation might produce dangerous tension in the Far East. Taiwan has good relations with Japan, and the United States sees itself as committed to its defense. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the Chinese government will not react to a step it considers as an intolerable provocation. Israel has good diplomatic and economic ties with both China and Taiwan. It should be hoped that [Israel's] Foreign Ministry will suitably, carefully, and wisely maneuver in the complex situation in that region, which enjoys the fastest economic growth in the world."

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